

Research and Development Project Incentives

Research and development (R&D) is considered to be among the most important areas for the development of the German economy. Industry and the public sector have made a commitment to spend around 3.5 percent of national GDP per year on R&D activities until 2025. This amounted to EUR 106 billion R&D spending in 2020.

Choosing the Right R&D Program

R&D projects can count on numerous forms of financial public support. There are many programs allocating R&D grants, interest-reduced loans and special partnership programs. Financing is provided by the European Union (EU), the German government, and the individual German federal states. R&D incentives programs in the form of grants generally provide money for R&D project personnel expenditure. Other costs for instruments and equipment may also be eligible if they can be clearly assigned to the relevant R&D project. R&D program guidelines specify in detail the eligible costs.

EU R&D Incentives

The EU's Horizon Europe program offers financial support to research and innovation projects at the European level and will run until the end of 2027. Support is allocated in the form of grants covering up to 100 percent of eligible project expenditures. With a total budget of nearly EUR 100 billion, Horizon Europe is the world's largest research funding program. Support is provided to R&D projects working at the transnational level with different project partners. The EU usually issues a call for proposals announcing the research area, eligibility guidelines and the available budget.

German Federal Government R&D Grants

All research programs financed by the German federal government have been concentrated within the High-Tech Strategy 2025. The High-Tech Strategy 2025 defines "future fields of activity" with a high dependency on ongoing high-tech research and development: health & health care; sustainability, climate protection & energy; mobility; urban & rural areas; security; economy & workplace 4.0. Each area consists of a number of different R&D programs. R&D project support is offered in the form of non-repayable grants. Enterprises usually can reach grant rates of up to 50 percent of eligible project costs. Higher rates may be available for SMEs and projects carried out in cooperation. Partnership between project partners, especially between enterprises and research institutions, is usually required. The federal government periodically calls for R&D project proposals followed by a competition of best project ideas.

In addition, a number of national programs without a specific technological focus also exist. Of these, the Central Innovation Program for SMEs (ZIM) is the most prominent. Application for incentives available under this program is possible at any time and without any prior calls for proposals. It makes provision for individual as well as for cooperation projects. It is possible to check the R&D project viability by a feasibility study.

German Federal State Funding

In addition to programs run by the federal government, each German federal state has its own R&D funding programs in place. Regional conditions and structures influence the R&D funding programs available. Some states place particular focus on specific industry clusters. However, there are also a number of programs where a specific technological focus is not required. Cooperation between project partners is not always necessary.

R&D Grant Programs



Further R&D Project Subsidy Options

R&D loans can be an alternative to R&D grants and entail several advantages: They are usually not attached to a specific technology field, application is possible at all times, and they can cover higher project costs. R&D loans are provided by different publicly owned development banks at the national and federal level. Equity is offered by both the KfW Group and federal state-owned or public-private venture capital companies to technically oriented companies. Conditions are negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Research Allowance Act

The German government supports R&D activities of companies flexible by tax relief. Companies with tax status in Germany and performing R&D activities are eligible for a tax credit of up to EUR 1 million annually. The eligible expenditure is the cost to company of salaries paid to employees working on the project, with the tax credit set at 25 percent of eligible costs to a maximum of EUR 4 million. Contract research is also eligible by the research allowance act. Projects qualify for the credit as long as they fall under one of the three broadly-defined research categories (see below). Companies wishing to benefit from the research tax credit act must get a certificate from a statutory body determining whether a project is eligible.

How to Benefit from Public R&D Spending

To participate in R&D grant programs, companies must define an R&D project with clear objectives and a fixed timeline. Projects should be intended to develop a new product, process or service that substantially surpasses existing products, processes or technical services in terms of their functions, parameters or features. An application for R&D funding also has to set out a commercialization plan, detailing how research results will be transformed into marketable products, processes or services that generate additional turnover and/or employment in the region where the R&D project is located.

The aid intensity level for a project depends on the size of the enterprise (small, medium-sized or large); whether the project is conducted in cooperation with other companies or research institutes; and the research category of the project. The research category expresses the scope of the intended project. There are three research categories: (1) fundamental research; (2) industrial research; (3) experimental development.



For individual R&D incentives support please contact GTAI's incentives experts: invest@gtai.com

At a Glance

- Support focuses on R&D grants
- Aid intensity level depends on: company size, research category, degree of partnership cooperation
- National High-Tech Strategy 2025 with planned funding volumes of 3.5 percent of GDP annually (public and private sector together) provided for projects focusing on R&D in "future fields of activity"
- Technology-open programs – with focus on SMEs – also available

Three Research Categories:

- **Fundamental Research**
Experimental or theoretical work aimed at gaining new knowledge
- **Industrial Research**
Research with a specific practical objective aimed at developing new products, processes, or services, or at improving existing ones
- **Experimental Development**
Research aimed at producing drafts, plans, and prototypes

The High-Tech-Strategy 2025



Plastic in the environment is to be reduced.



Industry is to be greenhouse gas neutral.



Mobility is to be clean and networked.



Biodiversity is to be conserved.

Source: The Federal Government 2022